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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/RUSSIA: SUPPORT GEORGIA, ENGAGE RUSSIA

REF: THE HAGUE 957

Classified By: Political and Economic Affairs Counselor Andrew C. Mann  
for reasons 1.5(b,d)

**¶1.** (C) SUMMARY: Dutch MFA staff believe Russia/Georgia multilateral negotiations will be long and tedious. They do not see Russian aggression against Georgia as "first in a pattern," but more of a one-of-a-kind occurrence. They believe we need to engage Russia, but Russia doesn't "share our values" on human rights. The Dutch will emphasize their support for Georgia in high-level meetings in Tbilisi, but "we can't offer much on EU or NATO." END SUMMARY.

#### NEXT STEPS ON RUSSIA/GEOGRAPHIA

**¶2.** (C) On November 18, PolDep and PolMilOff discussed Russia and Georgia with Hugo Klijn, MFA Chief of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Division, and Carin Lobbezoo, Klijn's deputy. Klijn said the process of Russia/Georgia multilateral negotiations will be "long and tedious." Under EU rules, the French presidency had the authority to decide on its own to move ahead with talks on a new partnership agreement with Russia. Nonetheless, the EU debate on Russian compliance with the ceasefire agreement was "extensive." Although skeptical, the Netherlands was ultimately swayed by the statement from the tough-minded UK and Swedish foreign ministers in favor of negotiations. The Dutch agreed it was best to keep the EU unified in responding to Russia.

#### RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

**¶3.** (C) Klijn thought Russia "got away with it" in Georgia. In fact, "we never believed Russia would return to its original numbers and positions" for troop placements. Moreover, the Russians love the EU Monitoring Mission, which serves as a human shield for their troops. However, Russia's aggression was "not first in a pattern" but rather a "one off." Russia has limited military capacity, as shown by its performance in Georgia. It made its political point with Georgia and probably does not need to bother to invade elsewhere. The declarations of independence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia "misfired," with only Nicaragua supporting them, and the move may "backfire" in the Caucasus. Finally, Russia needs to focus on its economy. So Russian aggression in Georgia reflects assertiveness, but does not foretell further "adventures."

**¶4.** (C) Overall, the Dutch want to see a new EU agreement with Russia on energy and democracy. They do not naively believe Russia will meet its commitments, but an agreement would give a pretext for the Allies to encourage Russian action. The Dutch want to continue bilateral exchanges and economic engagement with Russia. On human rights, President Medvedev's statements on Russian society have been "liberal," but the Dutch "do not expect wonders...they don't share our values." Medvedev's November 5 statement about the United States puzzled the Russian MFA, which was cut out of the

process of preparing the speech according to Dutch contacts in Moscow.

#### SUPPORT FOR GEORGIA

¶5. (C) The Dutch intend to emphasize their strong support for Georgia during an upcoming visit. Although FM Verhagen had to cancel his November 20-21 trip to Tbilisi due to the funeral of PM Balkenende's father, the Georgians quickly accepted Political Director De Gooijer (#3 in the MFA) as a substitute. De Gooijer will see the Georgian FM, Vice PM, and PM and opposition leaders during his visit. Klijn thought the Georgians were "desperate to see us" rather than waiting for FM Verhagen to reschedule his visit for 2009.

¶6. (C) The Dutch will note that as one of the ten largest bilateral donors, they strongly support Georgia. However, Georgia does not have a "flawless record" in following up on its European Neighborhood Policy agreements. Georgia needs to "speed reforms." So it is not the right time for a MAP decision by NATO, although the Bucharest Summit commitment still stands. The Dutch do not believe Russia should have a veto on new NATO members, but Russia's views should be considered. The Dutch will be looking for ideas on the NATO-Georgia Commission, and will express concern about the use of cluster munitions.

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